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DANISH MUSEUMS OF ARCHEOLOGY

By GEORGE GRANT MACCURDY

The National Museum at Copenhagen is composed of two departments, each being in turn subdivided. The first department, under the direction of Dr Sophus Müller, consists of three divisions: (1) Danish Antiquities, (2) Ethnographic Collection, (3) Classical and Egyptian Archeology. The chief division is that of Danish antiquities. Dr Carl Neergaard is the curator. The curatorship of the Ethnographic collection is at present vacant. This is one of the oldest and finest collections of its kind in Europe. To it now belong many valuable specimens from the old Museum Wormianum. Little or no effort is being made to increase the Ethnographic collection, it being the policy of the institution to concentrate its energies especially on the collection of national antiquities. The division of Classical and Egyptian Archeology is under the immediate charge of Dr Blinkenberg, another of Dr Müller's colleagues.

Dr W. Møllerup is director of the second department of the National Museum, which, like the first, is composed of three divisions, namely: (1) Coins, etc., (2) Middle Ages, (3) Historical Museum of the Kings of Denmark in the "Rosenborg Slot."

Of the combined collections, the chief interest is centered in the Danish antiquities. As a people the Danes are proud of their prehistoric past. No country has a more fruitful field of research for the periods covered by that past, and no country has been more fortunate in the amount and character of the service rendered in the domain of its national archeology. The traditions of a past, made glorious by such names as Thomsen and Worsaae, are being upheld by Sophus Müller, the present director. To the excellence of the work done for almost a hundred years is largely due the widespread interest in archeology which has led to the enactment of laws for the protection of monuments, and the control and disposition of museum collections. The best of the megalithic and other

prehistoric monuments, including kitchenmiddens, to the number of four thousand, now belong to the state, having been either bought or received as gifts from the owners of the land on which they are situated.

In addition to the great collection at the national capital, already mentioned, there are ten provincial museums of archeology in Denmark. Seven of these are in Jutland, the largest being at Aarhus and one each in Fünen, Laaland, and Bornholm. Each provincial museum receives annually 1000 kroner (\$280.00) from the state. In return for this subsidy, the museums may be called upon at any time to relinquish important specimens that may be wanted for the national collection at Copenhagen; and the director of the national collection is *ex officio* advisory director of all the provincial museums. This museum system has been in force only since 1880, so that important specimens obtained by the various museums prior to that date can never be appropriated by the Copenhagen Museum.

Dr Müller was making his annual tour of the provincial museums last summer at the time of my visit to Denmark. He had notified two of his colleagues of my coming—Drs Neergaard and Sarauw, who received me most cordially. To them I am much indebted for special facilities and many courtesies. The collections had increased largely since my visit in 1897, and new discoveries are being made constantly. One of last year's principal finds, dating from the early Bronze age, had just been placed on exhibition. It is a solar representation and dates from about the year 1000 B. C. The sun's disk is mounted on a chariot and represented as being drawn by a horse. Both figures rest on the six-wheeled chariot. One side of the disk was covered with gold-leaf, much of which is still intact. The spiral ornament was first chiseled in the bronze and then the gold-leaf applied by means of strong pressure. The other side is ornamented with a similar pattern, but the gold-leaf is lacking. The two figures were cast, the interior of the horse being filled with a fine, argillaceous paste. The chariot is executed with the same skill as the figures it supports, the style of the whole being purely northern. The fragments were found about six inches beneath the surface in a marshy district called Trundholm (Zealand). There

is no evidence that the locality was covered by water when the object was left there. The latter seems to have been intentionally broken and injured. The pieces were scattered over an area of about four meters square, and, in the opinion of Dr Müller,¹ had been left there as a religious offering and not as a hidden treasure. Dr Sarauw has brought together an interesting collection to represent the various grains, chiefly wheat and barley, encased in the paste of which some of the Neolithic pottery is made. He has in preparation an important publication on this subject.

Summer being the season for field work, one is fortunate to find as many as two members of the museum staff in the city at the same time. The day after I left Copenhagen, a party was expected to return from exploration in Jutland, and Dr Neergaard was to proceed immediately to another part of that peninsula (Virring) and resume excavations at an extensive prehistoric cemetery, dating from the first to the third century, A. D. The locality has already yielded a large amount of valuable material. In regard to explorations, provincial museums are not allowed to excavate without a permit from the National Museum authorities, but they are, of course, reimbursed for such specimens as are relinquished in favor of the Copenhagen collection. While the system is, on the whole, very satisfactory, it is defective in so far as it tends to discourage competition among the various museums. There is no incentive to local pride, hence provincial treasures are seldom if ever augmented by gifts from private citizens.

Antiquities of gold and silver found in Denmark are treated as a class apart. They must become the property of the state, which pays the finder a sum equal to their intrinsic value, to which a small bonus is added. The bonus lessens the temptation to sell to another purchaser than the state, or even to melt down precious relics for the mere value of the metal they may contain. Thus has the National Museum succeeded in bringing together an almost unrivaled collection of gold and silver ornaments and utensils. These treasures, once in its possession, are guarded with the utmost care. In 1802 the collection was robbed of its most valued possession,

¹ *Nordiske Fortidsminder*, 1903, p. 322.

the two celebrated gold horns found in 1639 and 1734. The loss was all the more serious in view of the fact that no casts had been taken of the originals, the only record left being unsatisfactory drawings. Such a theft would be impossible now. The curator, in person, opens and closes each day the special cases in which gold and silver objects are displayed.

Objects in bronze are also much prized, because of their comparative rarity and archeological bearing. The Copenhagen Museum alone has enough material from which to write a fairly complete history of the Bronze age in northern Europe. One of the most attractive cases is that containing twenty-one large bronze trumpets (Lure). These were made in pairs suggesting the paired horns of an ox. Half a dozen of the best preserved trumpets needed only slight repairs to put them in condition for use. And what could be more appropriate than to make use of them in connection with the celebration of the National holiday! This is precisely what Dr Müller has decided to do, the first annual concert having taken place on the 24th of last June.¹ This, it may be remembered, is the Feast of St John, supposed by some to be a relic of Baal worship, and still quite generally observed in the countries of Europe. While on an archeological excursion in France (departments of Indre-et-Loire and Dordogne), last June and July, my attention was attracted to evidences of numerous recent bonfires at crossroads and other convenient meeting places. My companions, Frenchmen, informed me that these bonfires were lighted on the eve (June 23) of St John's Day. Door lintels were also decorated with flowers and twigs. The same custom is said to exist in England and Ireland. In Denmark it is the national holiday. Returning to the bronze trumpets, the playing last June was done by two musicians from the royal opera, the ceremony taking place on the 24th at high noon. The performers stood on the low, flat roof over the entrance to the Museum. They turned first toward the inner court and blew a blast; then faced the throng of 10,000 spectators, and played the National hymn, the performance lasting about twenty minutes.

¹ Two or three concerts had been given previously, but at longer intervals than one year.

The national antiquities were formerly housed in the "Kristiansborg Slot"; were there, in fact, when the theft of the gold horns took place. After a disastrous fire which practically destroyed the palace, the Danish antiquities were transferred to the adjoining "Prinsens Palais," which still serves as their repository. It is an old structure, not perfectly adapted to museum purposes, but the curators have made the most of their facilities. The labeling (in Danish only) is thorough and leaves nothing to be desired in point of execution. Foreigners not familiar with the Danish language may procure a very satisfactory catalogue in German (*Führer durch die Dänische Sammlung: Vorgeschichtliche Zeit*). An English catalogue is in preparation.

It is unfortunate that such a large and systematically arranged collection should not be made the basis of university instruction in the subject of national archeology, and that the author of such an excellent text-book as Müller's *Nordische Altertumskunde* should not occupy a professorship in the neighboring university. Worsaae used to offer a course gratis, but now there is only an occasional (free) lecture.